



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FRONT RANGE CENTER
3170 EAST MAIN STREET
CANON CITY, COLORADO 81212

FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
San Luis Valley Public Lands Center
May 18, 2004

MINUTES

ATTENDEES:

GROUP 1

Rick Thompson
Gene King
Robert Shoemaker
Chuck Rech
Virginia Patton

GROUP 2

Frances Mathews
Josh Osterhoudt
Larry Strohl
Kaaren Hardy

GROUP 3

Michael Bush
Loren Whittemore
Clarke Becker

RAC members not in attendance: Keith McNew, Joseph Duda, Leslie Wildensen

GUESTS: Joyce Broughton, Don Thompson, Doris Morgan, Senator Allard Office; Hugh Hallock, Valley Courier; Christine Canaly; Linsay Sandidge

BLM/USFS PERSONNEL:

Roy Masinton, Ken Smith, Katie Franke, Mark Swinney, Tom Goodwin, Doug Clark, Roberto Martinez, Jeremiah Martinez, Pam Brown, and Tom Malecek

There was adequate attendance for a quorum.

Chairman Loren Whittemore called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

COUNCIL BUSINESS: Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Manager updated the Council on the nominations for the 5 positions on the Council whose terms expire this August. There are 12 nominees for the 5 positions. The Secretary will probably make the appointments in mid-August.

The EIS team in Washington is reviewing the public comments received on the Proposed Grazing Rule Draft EIS. They received approximately 15,000 comments. The Final EIS is expected to be published in September and the Final Rule in October, 2004.

Whittemore and Masinton attended the meeting in Phoenix for RAC Chairs last week. Whittemore said the meeting was good and he feels the members time on the RACs is time well spent. Because of the success of the RACs, other agencies are beginning to look at similar alternatives to involve the public in their management process.

Masinton said the weed resolution, passed at the March meeting, has been sent to the BLM State Director and the other RACs in Colorado. The other RACs will be discussing a similar resolution at their next meeting. The RAC members will be kept informed.

Gene King said the local four wheel clubs have joined the weed battle with the State and will work to stop the spread of weeds.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joyce Broughton, is running for “US Senate 3rd District” as a Republican. She commented that Colorado needs to keep the water in the state. We have good water people but we are sending out too much water. After numerous political comments Loren Whittmore informed Ms. Broughton that the RAC is not a political forum and thanked her for her comments.

Chris Canaly, Chair of the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council commented on the BLM Travel Management Plan and asked the RAC to help with the Plan. The local public lands conservation group just finished a ½ million acre inventory of U.S. Forest Service Lands in the San Luis Valley. The issue of roadless access will be very important in the BLM Travel Plan. The Ecosystem Council is requesting good science be used and considered in recommendations. Canaly commented on the Goldbelt Travel Plan and felt that a lot of compromises were met and feels the environmental community is very satisfied. She is hoping for the same outcome with the San Luis Valley Travel Management Plan.

MANAGERS UPDATE:

Mark Swinney, Staff Officer for the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center updated the RAC on the dual delegation and the Public Lands Center in Monte Vista. Field managers were dual designated a few years back and now the Center Manager and Forest Supervisor are dual delegated to complete the Service First concept. BLM and the Rio Grande National Forest are now officially integrated

Tom Malecek, Field Manager for the Divide Field Office, is new to the area but appreciates the RAC getting involved in the Travel Management Planning process. Range management will be an important issue in the Divide Field Office. Malecek explained the recent split of the permits and range allotments to include the Divide District. The management of roughly 8 to 10 allotments was moved from the La Jara Field Office to the Divide Field Office. This will be a benefit to the public and the BLM in the long run.

Roberto Martinez, Field Manager for the La Jara Field Office, commented the public seems to like Service First and the two agencies working together. However, employees have struggled with this new concept. The job is unique and hard at times when working with and managing two agencies. Martinez thanked Roy Masinton for his tutoring, it was a big help in making the transition smoother.

Tom Goodwin, Field Manager for the Saguache Field Office addressed an issue that is developing and primarily affecting permittees in the center of the San Luis Valley because of the concentrations of cattle in that area. The elk herd for the San Luis Valley is currently about 11,000 while the objective is 1,500. The situation includes multiple land ownership – State, Park

Service, National Park and public land – although the majority of the land is private. There are a large number of bull elk running the farm circles on the Valley Floor. They are using kill permits as directed by the Division of Wildlife (DOW), however traditional methods are not working. Crop damage is occurring from elk moving from one certified field to another and there is potential claims of \$250,000 to \$500,000. BLM is working with the DOW and they have a concern also.

Whittemore asked if the RAC wanted to draft a resolution. It was decided that Rick Thompson, Michael Bush and Larry Strohl would draft a resolution for the Council to finalize at the July meeting. Masinton cautioned that BLM's ability to influence the DOW about land other than public land is minimal and we should focus on our concern about reducing the numbers of elk on public lands.

Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Manager. The South Park Plan Amendment is progressing. Approximately 55 people attended a public meeting and 40 letters were received with comments. This summer, BLM employees will be verifying the information that was received from the public. An Environmental Assessment will be written this fall with an opportunity for the public to comment next winter. The primary purpose of the amendment is to decide which public land parcels will be disposed of and which parcels will be retained.

The RAC has been very helpful during the planning for the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan and BLM will continue to use the Council for assistance and input on future plans.

Break: 1045

Mark Swinney informed the RAC that the BLM fire program in the SLV got an interagency engine and will have a BLM engine foreman.

Swinney discussed the San Luis Valley Travel Plan – They are planning to follow the example of the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan. Scoping meetings are scheduled for May 24, 25, 27 and June 1 and 3. He is hoping to have a draft document by April, 2006. The public scoping, interpretation of GIS data, road analysis and trail inventory, and several other steps must be completed first. Written public comments will be accepted from start to finish, however they will be most effectively used if received by July 1, 2004. Michael Bush is the lead on the RAC Travel Management subgroup.

Lunch 1135

Doug Clark, Wildlife Biologist, briefed the Council on the Blanca Wetlands. He discussed the lands, soils, history and the use of the Blanca Wetlands and its significant value in the Valley. The water table has dropped dramatically through history. BLM took the lead in the 60's to initiate project developments. Presently there are 207 wetland sites consisting of fresh water ponds, marshes, etc. The area is gaining some birds and waterfowl and loosing some others at the same time. BLM is currently conducting numerous tours and the Wetlands are becoming very popular with the public.

Glenda Torres, Natural Resource Specialist with the Valley Fuels Team, discussed fuels treatment methods being used in the Valley. The four methods used are hydro axe, hand thinning, burning, and chipping. Burning of piles in the winter is common with the use of the chipper in the summer. The goal of the fuels program is fuels reduction near communities, forest health restoration and wildlife habitat enhancement. Crestone fuels project in 2004 – 170 acres of hand thinning, 25 acres of chipping and pile burning in the winter. Noland Gulch fuels reduction in 2004 - 200 acres by hydro axe. In the Del Norte Area, South Fork Fuels reduction for 2004 - 40 acres of hand thinning and pile burning in the fall and in 2005 - 200 acres of hydro axe work are planned. In the La Jara area the Jacobs Hill fuels reduction project in 2004 - BLM 185 acres and U.S. Forest Service 167 acres of hydro axe work. A general range of the cost for hydro axe work is \$155-\$220 per acre.

Mark Marshall, Recreation Planner at the Monte Vista office, discussed the recreational opportunities in the San Luis Valley. This is a unique area, with a low population and very culturally diverse, however there are about 750,000 to 800,000 visitors per year. There are a broad range of recreation opportunities in the Valley. Penitente Canyon gets 60,000 visitors per year for climbing, hiking, and biking. The site is developed with 6 trailheads and 16 miles of non-motorized trails. Zapata Falls has a visitation of 80,000 visitors per year. This is a day use only area with hiking, backpacking, and 7 miles of BLM trails non-motorized. Blanca wetlands have about 40,000 visitors per year with a seasonal closer for nesting.

He also discussed other opportunities including OHV use, mountain biking, horseback riding, fishing, hang gliding and other recreational activities on public land. Future plans include: a 15 mile loop trail at Hells Gate, a campground at Zapata Falls with 25 sites, the Alder/Dorsey campground with 20 sites, and delineation and interpretation of the historical significance of the Old Spanish Trail.

Break: 2:15

Pete Zwaneveld, Royal Gorge Field Office Planner, updated the RAC on the Gold Belt Travel Management Plan. Everyone was given an information packet on the proposed action from the environmental assessment, that will be mailed to the public. A public Protest and Appeal period will begin in June. There is a 60 day Governors review on any plan amendments. BLM has coordinated with all agencies to ensure they are clear to proceed and are seeking one decision document that includes over 1200 routes. An appeal would delay or stop only the route appealed. Motion to give RAC approval to the decision as written was made by Clark Becker Seconded by Rick Thompson and passed unanimously.

Tom Malecek talked about the Healthy Forest Initiative. The purpose is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. More people are building in the forest thus creating urban interface risks. Mechanical treatments have become very popular but this is an expensive alternative. Prescribed burns and wildland fire is still used but is complicated with dry conditions as well as urban interface. The main difference is there is now an objection process not an appeal process. People have to sue to stop the process.

Tom Goodwin. Forest insects are a major problem on BLM and Forest Service lands. He discussed beetle and insect problems on trees both on BLM and U.S. Forest Service land in his area. Michael Bush supported the Healthy Forest Initiative and specifically in the Saguache area. Bush agreed that the agencies should protect areas not infected and to work to stop the spread. There was some discussion and a resolution was drafted supporting the control of disease infestations in the forest ecosystem of the area. Bush made a motion to approve the resolution. Virginia seconded the motion and the Resolution was passed unanimously.

Larry Strohl will work with Michael Bush and Rick Thompson on the Resolution about the increasing elk herd in the Valley and present it to the RAC for discussion at the July meeting.

May 19, 2004 the Council visited Blanca Wetlands and Zapata Falls Recreation Area and fuels reduction project site.

Francis Mathews moved to adjourn
Loren Whittemore seconded
Meeting Adjourned.

Roy L. Masinton
Front Range Center Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Loren R. Whittemore
Chairman
Front Range Resource Advisory Council